3:Gough E-4, 5 (1947-1949)1961 AWll Kerala AWll
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taravād. A woman might also visit for several weeks each year. Brother and younger sister, like a man and his sister's daughter, observed rules of partial avoidance—associated with incest prohibitions—during their periods of co-residence.

Sisters were always separated upon marriage, for the Nayars of this area, unlike those to the south, forbade the marriage of two brothers to two sisters. They say that such marriages would endanger the unity of the brothers' taravād by introducing into it too strong a contingent from another lineage (Gough, 1952). Sisters were together, however, during childhood in their father's house, and were often reunited in old age when they went back to the taravād. Although they might seldom have stayed there during childhood and early youth, women seem usually to have died in their matrilineal ancestral homes. A woman was often widowed in old age. Alternatively she might elect to leave her husband and return to her taravād and sons when her period of childbearing was ended. In any case a woman's body had to be cremated and her funeral rites performed in the garden of her taravād house.

Women in avunculocal residence were partly maintained by their husbands' taravāds in return for domestic services. Nevertheless, important distributive ties persisted between them and their matrilineal kinsmen. Usually their kāranavan sent quantities of grain and clothing to them and their children twice annually after the harvests as part of their maintenance.

MARRIAGE

Following the tāli rite, a girl entered into a marriage relationship (sambandham) with one man at about the age of eleven. The father's sister's son, if of suitable age, was considered the rightful claimant. If the girl did not marry him her kāranavan must pay a token fine to him at the marriage ceremony. The giving of the cloth by the husband which marked the start of a sambandham was carried out with ceremony in the girl's ancestral house and was the occasion for a large feast to relatives of both parties. After the marriage had been consummated in the girl's house the couple were ceremonially conducted to the bridegroom's taravād and the girl was formally received into it by her husband's mother and his kāranavan's wife.

While a marriage endured the husband had exclusive rights in his wife's sexuality. If he detected her in adultery he might by custom kill her lover, cut off the hair of his wife, and send her home after divorce. A woman was not, however, excommunicated from caste

5·Mehra E-5 (no date) 1956 AWll Kerala AWll
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of particular importance is the ritual conducted in the case of barren women who seek divine intercession of the serpent gods. The afflicted couple come on a Sunday morning to the snake temple after a purificatory bath and after putting on new garments. They request the priest to conduct a propitiatory *puja* and offer flour to the deity. Thereafter, a bronze plate on which the name of the person is carved is placed inverted at a spot. After a year when they have been blessed with a child, they repair to the temple once more to offer thanks for the boon granted. The child is helped to lift the bronze plate and under it a small serpent is observed signifying that all is well. In the event of there being no snake underneath, it is taken as a bad omen predicting the death of the child. If even after ten years no child is born to the couple, the unretrieved bronze plate is discarded, on the presumption that the deity has not seen fit to grant the wishes of the devotees.

There is also a class of pious people who have through their devotion to, and worship of, the snake deity, acquired the art of curing victims of snake-bite. They are called *sarpa vaidyas* and cases of snake-bite are brought to them for treatment. The man chants certain magical formulae and tears a betel leaf in front of a pot of milk. The serpent is supposed to come out of hiding and to withdraw the venom, thus effecting a gradual cure.

But modern trends are contrariwise, and a gradual decline is discernible in the ritual of snake worship in a large majority of households which have snake shrines. Less emphasis is paid to the traditional worship of the serpent, and what little propitiation is done is more or less symbolic. Makeshift arrangements are often made, and worship by proxy is offered by the priest, in the absence of the family members, who merely pay a fixed sum to the priest for his labours, and thereby absolve themselves of the guilt of neglecting the snake gods.

Apart from simplification of the ritual of snake worship, yet another symptom of the decay of the cult appears to be the reduced importance that is given to the upkeep of the existing snake shrines. Many erstwhile sacred shrines are in a dilapidated condition. Perhaps in future, snake worship itself might become a thing of the past.

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1 Tod: *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, 88.

2 Rivett & Maclagan: *Glossary of Tribes and Castes of Punjab & N. W. F. P.*, 149.

3 Gurdon: *The Khasis*, 98-102.

4 Dubois & Beauchamps: *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, 641.

5 Hodson: *The Naithels*, 110.

6:Fawcett G-5 (ca. 1900)1915
AWll Kerala AWll
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the couch on which the Nâyar has his oil bath. The surface of it is sloping, the higher end being where the head is laid, and it is scooped out so as to suit the curvatures of the body lying flat.* Lying on her back, her head is raised and the thighs are stretched wide apart. Very often she holds in each hand a rope suspended from the ceiling, by way of support. The child is received by a woman of the barber caste."

DEATH AND SUCCEEDING CEREMONIES.

When the dying person is about to embark for that bourne from which no traveller returns, when the breath is about to leave his body, the members of the household, and all friends who may be present, one by one pour a little water, a few drops from a tiny cup made of a leaf or two of the tulsi plant, into his mouth, holding in the hand a piece of gold or a gold ring; the idea being that the water should touch gold ere it enters the mouth of the person who is dying. If the Taravâd is rich enough to afford it, a small gold coin, (a Râsi fanam, if one can be procured †) is placed in the mouth, and the lips are closed. As soon as death has taken place, the corpse is removed from the cot or bed, and carried to the vatakkini (a room in the northern end of the house) where it is placed on long plantain leaves spread out on the floor; and while it is in this room, whether by day or by night, a lamp is kept burning, and one member of the Taravâd holds the head in his lap and another the feet in the same way; and here the neighbours come to take a farewell look at the dead.

As the Malayâlis believe that disposal of a corpse by cremation or burial as soon as possible after death is conducive to the happiness of the spirit of the departed, no time is lost in setting about the funeral. The bodies of senior members of a Taravâd, male or female, are burned; those of children under two are buried; so too are the bodies of all persons who have died of cholera or small-pox.‡ When preparations for the funeral have been made, the corpse is removed to the natumuttam or central yard of the house if there is one (there always is

* Every Nâyar, and for the matter of that, every Malayali, has an oil bath about once a week or as often as he can afford. The person is well shampooed with gingelly oil.

† These are now rare.

‡ It is the same amongst the Khonds of Ganjam.

9:Iyer E-4, 5 (ca. 1902-1906)1912
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[789] children. Tiger's whiskers have also the same efficacy against
[825] demoniacal influence. The flesh is eaten as medicine, while
[757] the skin boiled in gingelly oil and strained into the ear, removes deafness.

539 There is a common belief that, should the nest of a brah-
825 many kite be found, and one of the young ones be attached to it by a string, the squall breaks away, generally leaving a por-
[789] tion of the line attached to the nest as it becomes strong. The nest which is formed of sticks should then be thrown into a running stream, when, if any of the sticks that compose it float against the current, they will, on being applied to any fetters, cause them immediately to fly into a thousand fragments.

[171] The owl which is an emblem of wisdom in Europe, and the goose that of stupidity, completely change their respective places in the east, the former becoming a symbol of stupidity, the latter that of wisdom.

[787] The hooting of the owl heard at night, has, in all parts of the world and in all ages, been considered ominous of
[763] evil, and is consequently much dreaded. In Cochin, it is generally believed, that the hooting of an owl betokens an impending calamity or even the death of an individual near whose abode its loathsome cry is heard: and so, dwellers in the neighbouring houses at once turn out and drive it away.

824 Jack-o'-lantern:—These are called *Kollykatta Pisáchus*
539 (ghosts which emit fire from their mouths), and make their
[776] appearance on the side of tanks, rivers, and marshy places during rainy or foggy nights. They fly away or disappear at the sight of men and are much dreaded by the people.

Preëminent among the trees in the town of Cochin, and towering above all others along the sea-shore and sides of the back-water are the cocoanut palms (cocos nucifera linn), every portion of which, from the leaves to the roots, may be turned to some useful purpose.

[776] There is a tradition that the Raja of Benares, who was a stre-
[643] nuous worshipper of one supreme God, and rejected the custom of making offerings to inferior divinities, became, in course of time, almost equal to the Gods, and created many of the grains now in common use. As his powers increased, so did his ambition, and he meditated creating another species of human beings very superior to anything then existing in the world. But after he had completed its head, the demi-gods became alarmed and

9:Iyer E-4, 5 (ca. 1902-1906) 1912
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prevailed on him to cease his work. The head was therefore transformed into a cocoanut which was henceforth to be one of the most useful of all trees in the vegetable kingdom, and was dedicated to Ganésa, the patron of science and learning.

Funeral customs.

The Nayars generally burn their dead bodies, while those of children under two or three years of age as well as those of persons who have died of small-pox or cholera are buried. When a Nayar is at the point of death, the members of the house-hold and friends who may be present, one by one, pour into his mouth a few drops of Ganges or other holy water or *kanji* water, from a tiny cup made of a leaf or two of the *tulsi* plant. While doing this, they hold in the hand a piece of gold or a gold ring and the water is supposed to touch the gold, before it enters the mouth of the dying person. Sometimes, a *fanam* or gold piece is placed in the mouth, and the lips are closed.

As soon as death has taken place, the corpse is removed from the cot or bed and carried to the *vadakkini*, a room at the northern end of the house, where it is placed on long plantain leaves spread out on the floor, and while it is there, a lamp is kept burning both day and night. One member of the family holds the head in his lap, while another the feet in the same way, and here it is that the neighbours come to have a last look at the dead. All the while, the names of gods or sacred texts are loudly recited in the hope that the soul may quit the world with recollections of God which would serve as a passport to Heaven. Immediately death occurs, the members of the house and the relatives assembled there burst out into loud lamentations, announcing the sad event to the caste-men of the village who attend at once. When preparations for the funeral have been made, the dead body is carried to the *nadu-mittam* or central yard of the house, or if there is no central yard, to the front yard where it is again laid on plantain leaves. It is then washed, anointed and neatly clothed, and the usual marks of sandal-wood paste and ashes, as in life, are made. The senior member of the deceased's family along with others including the sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, and all the relatives, place new cotton cloths over the dead, and these are used for tying up the corpse before being taken to the cremation ground. Before removal, another ceremony called *Para Nirakkuka* (filling up *para*, a measure thrice the size of a gallon)

13:Thurston & Rangachari E-4, 5 (no date) 1909
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thorns. The wires or thorns are left in the ears. In the case of girls, the hole is subsequently gradually distended by the insertion of nine different kinds of thorns or plugs in succession, the last of which is a bamboo plug, till it is large enough to admit the characteristic Malayâli ear ornament, the boss-shaped toda."

Of the death ceremonies among the Nâyars of Malabar, the following detailed account is given by Mr. Fawcett. "When the dying person is about to embark for that bourne from which no traveller returns, and the breath is about to leave his body, the members of the household, and all friends who may be present, one by one, pour a little water, a few drops from a tiny cup made of a leaf or two of the tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*), into his mouth, holding in the hand a piece of gold or a gold ring, the idea being that the person should touch gold ere it enters the mouth of the person who is dying. If the taravâd is rich enough to afford it, a small gold coin (a râsi fanam, if one can be procured) is placed in the mouth, and the lips are closed. As soon as death has taken place, the corpse is removed from the cot or bed and carried to the vatakkini (a room in the northern end of the house), where it is placed on long plantain leaves spread out on the floor; and, while it is in the room, whether by day or night, a lamp is kept burning, and one member of the taravâd holds the head in his lap, and another the feet in the same way; and here the neighbours come to take a farewell look at the dead. As the Malayâlis believe that disposal of a corpse by cremation or burial as soon as possible after death is conducive to the happiness of the spirit of the departed, no time is lost in setting about the funeral. The bodies of senior members of the taravâd, male or female, are burned, those of children under two are buried; so too are the bodies of all

764 613 importance that the whole pyre burns at once. The greatest care is taken that it burns as a whole, consuming every part of the corpse. While the corpse is being consumed, all the members of the deceased's taravād who carried it to the pyre go and bathe in a tank (there is always one in the compound or grounds round every Nāyar's house). The eldest, he who bears the piece of torn cloth and iron (the key), carries an earthen pot of water, and all return together to the place of cremation. [763] It should be said that, on the news of a death, the neighbours assemble, assisting in digging the grave, preparing the pyre, and so on, and, while the members of the taravād go and bathe, they remain near the corpse. By the time the relatives return it is almost consumed by the fire, and the senior Anandravan carries the pot of water thrice round the pyre, letting the water leak out by making holes in the pot as he walks round. On completing the third round, he dashes the pot on the ground close by where the head of the dead body has been placed. A small image representing the deceased is then made out of raw rice, and to this image a few grains of rice and gingelly seeds are offered. When this has been done, the relatives go home and the neighbours depart, bathing before entering their houses. When the 764 cremation has been done by night, the duty of sēshakriya 782 (making offerings to the deceased's spirit) must be begun 775 the next day between 10 and 11 A.M., and is done on 613 seven consecutive days. In any case the time for this ceremony is after 10 and before 11, and it continues for seven days. It is performed as follows. All male members of the taravād younger than the deceased go together to a tank and bathe, *i.e.*, they souse themselves in the water, and return to the house. The eldest of them, the man who tore off the strip of cloth from

13:Thurston & Rangachari E-4, 5 (no date) 1909
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The spirits of those who have committed suicide, or met death by any violent means, are always particularly vicious and troublesome to the taravād, their spirits possessing and rendering miserable some unfortunate member of it. Unless they are pacified, they will ruin the taravād, so Brāhman priests are called in, and appease them by means of tilahōmam, a rite in which sacrificial fire is raised, and ghī, gingelly, and other things are offered through it."

"There are," Mr. Fawcett writes, "many interesting features in the death ceremonies as performed by the Kiriattil class. Those who carry the corpse to the pyre are dressed as women, their cloths being wet, and each carries a knife on his person. Two junior male members of the taravād thrust pieces of mango wood into the southern end of the burning pyre, and, when they are lighted, throw them over their shoulders to the southwards without looking round. Close to the northern end of the pyre, two small sticks are fixed in the ground, and tied together with a cloth, over which water is poured thrice. All members of the taravād prostrate to the ground before the pyre. They follow the enangu carrying the pot of water round the pyre, and go home without looking round. They pass to the northern side of the house under an arch made by two men standing east and west, holding at arms length, and touching at the points, the spade that was used to dig the pit under the pyre, and the axe with which the wood for the pyre was cut or felled. After this is done the kodali ceremony, using the spade, axe, and big knife. These are placed on the leaves where the corpse had lain. Then follows circumambulation and prostration by all, and the leaves are committed to the burning pyre."

In connection with the death ceremonies, it is noted in the Cochin Census Report, 1901, that "the last

13:Thurston & Rangachari E-4, 5.(no date) 1909
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763 184 [778] moments of a dying person are really very trying. All members (male and female), junior to the dying person, pour into his or her mouth drops of Ganges or other holy water or conjee (rice) water in token of their last tribute of regard. Before the person breathes his last, he or she is removed to the bare floor, as it is considered sacrilegious to allow the last breath to escape while lying on the bed, and in a room with a ceiling, which last is supposed to obstruct the free passage of the breath. The names of gods, or sacred texts are loudly dinned into his or her ears, so that the person may quit this world with the recollections of God serving as a passport to heaven. The forehead, breast, and the joints especially are besmeared with holy ashes, so as to prevent the messengers of death from tightly tying those parts when they carry away the person. Soon 764 184 after the last breath, the dead body is removed to some open place in the house, covered from top to toe with a washed cloth, and deposited on the bare floor with the head towards the south, the region of the God of death. A lighted lamp is placed near the head, and other lights are placed all round the corpse. A mango tree is cut, or other firewood is collected, and a funeral pyre is constructed in the south-eastern corner of a compound or garden known as the corner of Agni, which is always reserved as a cemetery for the burning or burial of the dead. All male members, generally junior, bathe, and, without wiping their head or body, they remove the corpse to the yard in front of the house, and place it on a plantain leaf. It is nominally anointed with oil, and bathed in water. Ashes and sandal are again smeared on the forehead and joints. The old cloth is removed, and the body is covered with a new unwashed cloth or a piece of silk. A little gold or silver, or small coins are put into the